FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   Oct. 12, 2005
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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOGNIZES
NATIONAL LATINO AIDS AWARNESS DAY
Latinos Infected with HIV/AIDS Four Times More Often Than Whites

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(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will join organizations across the nation on Oct. 15 to recognize the Third Annual National Latino AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD). A national day of awareness and prevention, NLAAD was created to encourage Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) testing to reduce the spread of the disease in the Latino community. AIDS service organizations, community-based organizations and local health departments across the Commonwealth will sponsor special testing events and educational programs encouraging Latinos to get tested for HIV.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is a major threat to Latinos. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), poverty and substance abuse drive the epidemic in the Latino community. Hispanics continue to face challenges in accessing quality health care, treatment and prevention services.

As of Dec. 31, 2003, the CDC estimates there have been 172,993 Hispanics diagnosed with AIDS in the United States. There are approximately 800 Latinos reported to be living with HIV/AIDS in Virginia. VDH believes the reported cases underestimate the true number of Latinos living with the disease because of language barriers and fear of deportation for illegal immigrants. The case rate for Latinos is four times higher than that of whites.

 "HIV testing is crucial to reducing infection rates," said Casey W. Riley, director of VDH's Division of HIV, STD and Pharmacy Services. "National Latino AIDS Awareness Day should encourage Latinos and people of all races to get tested for HIV and take control of their health."

For more information about HIV/AIDS, test sites and other sexually transmitted diseases, contact the HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Hotline at (800) 533-4148 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/std. You can also visit the Web site to view a list of statewide activities commemorating National Latino AIDS Awareness Day. Events are subject to change.

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